

From the Bookshelf

A General's Story By Roland Sawyer

Command Missions: A Personal Story, by Lt. Gen. L. K. Truscott, Jr. (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc. 570 pp. \$7.50.)

One can sympathize with generals and admirals who write lengthy memoirs. Their experiences are so much more exciting, vivid, varied, and stimulating than the prosaic lives of most civilians that they always have a story to tell. General Truscott had a remarkable career in World War II. He fought his way ashore at Port Lyautey, Morocco, and commanded combat operations across North Africa, into Sicily, through Italy, up into France, and, at the war's end, reached Central Europe. He was a member of that competent group of military commanders who came out of nowhere, seemingly, to bring renown and honor to the United States.

There appear to be three ways in which a military commander can tell his story. He can produce a formal record, as did Fleet Admiral King or President Eisenhower. He can publish a diary, as was arranged for the late General Stilwell or as will be done in General Patton's case. Or he can simply write a personal story that too often turns out to be historically important for the record, but which should have been edited hard before being set in type. Generals and admirals, however, are not accustomed to being edited.

General Truscott's book belongs in this third category. It is not as long as Gen. "Hap" Arnold's memoir or as Admiral King's "Naval Record," but it is still too long for most readers, whether military or civilian. The experiences of most of these men fall into a pattern, and, to a considerable extent, when one has read one such memoir one has read them all. There are the obscure beginnings of unknown majors and commanders who suddenly received the magic call from Washington in 1940, 1941, or 1942. Then the first field assignments, includ-

ing exciting trips, operations under fire, and rapid promotion to flag rank. The personalities of command unfold; this general stays too far behind the front in his command post, seldom visits his troops, and falls into disfavor; that admiral is too cautious, won't cooperate with the Army, or has some other dragging quality. Gradually the stronger men emerge, to drive on to victory and to write memoirs, while the others descend into obscurity.

Which makes the best book—diary, record, or personal story? The answer, of course, depends upon the author. As a rule the personal story comes out ahead. Admiral King's book will not be read for pleasure, and General Eisenhower's approaches that category 10 years after D-Day. Sir Winston Churchill, whose five-volume account of World War II embraces all three, diary, record, and personal story, comes out far, far ahead. He, of course, stood at the summit of the British war effort. But he is also an accomplished writer. It requires both the experiences of command and the training and practice of writing to produce an excellent memoir.

General Truscott's story is usually interesting, though it does not vary much from the traditional pattern. He was a soldier's general, genuinely interested in his men, and his book is filled with examples of the techniques of combat leadership. Students of military tactics or military history will want this book for reference. In addition, General Truscott is bravely outspoken in criticizing some of his contemporaries. This lifts the book above that of the lifeless statement for the record.

General Truscott's story is not dull, and thus it will have a certain special contemporary interest. But it is too long. Essentially, it is a book which collectors of war libraries will want and which institutional libraries of record must include.